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ABSTRACT

The overall communication network specific to remedial reading frequently is connected by very weak linkages within and between components of the system, namely parent/school, board of education/administration, administration/reading teacher, reading teacher/classroom teacher, and reading teacher/parent. This paper tells how one school built a communication network for more effective articulation of remedial services and brought parents into the network. After presenting and describing the communication model developed by the school, the paper discusses the way in which communication "bridges" were built during three sequential stages that stressed programs to develop children's language and perceptual skills, teacher inservice training, and parent-teacher workshops. Among the topics discussed are ways in which funds for the programs were obtained, the role of the reading teacher and classroom teachers, the use of the reading room as a resource center, enlistment of parental support for children's reading efforts, and topics dealt with in parent-teacher workshops. (GW)

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DEVELOPING CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

The role of the parent in affecting children's learning is recognized as a necessary and important ingredient in the educational process. The family must be brought as participants into the educational communication network if we are to make more than temporary gains in scholastic improvement. A recent headstart study indicated that only one per cent of the children whose parents were involved in a home-based education program needed special services at fifth grade while thirty per cent of the control group needed help at the fifth grade level.

Olive S. Niles from the Conneticut Department of Education stated, "We have tended to think if we got things going right in our classroom, everything else would be fine. But the individual teacher can't do the job. It is what is going on in the entire system that matters...the whole system means more than the school...it is the entire community." Niles seemed to be saying the problem with education is the lack of communication between and within the educational community.

As a remedial reading teacher and a former classroom teacher, I recognized that gains with a few students were not enough. The thrust must be with the entire educational community in developing an effective channel of communication which placed heavy emphasis on remedial reading. Building a communication network for more effective articulation of remedial services and bringing the parents of remedial children into this network has been central to developing a communication model in our local setting for the past six years.

Basic to this study is the assumption that the overall communication network specific to remedial reading is connected by very weak linkages within and between components of the system, namely: parent/school; board of education/administration; administration/reading teacher; reading teacher/classroom teacher and reading teacher/parent.

In order for the school to meet the educational expectations of the community, it must first know what those expectations are and secondly design programs that are capable of meeting those needs. It then becomes the school's job to skillfully communicate these expectations to all components of the system and to implement the programs so that the final product is acceptable to the community. Teachers become control points in this communication system and they must be constantly aware that it is the process that determines the product. Without this inter-school communication system capable of refining and relaying messages, the school will fail to serve its clientele.

This inter-school communication network assumes the existence of an inter-community network which also is capable of refining and relaying messages. If, and only if, these overlapping and inter-related communication systems both exist and function can failure in the classroom be avoided and success assured.

When the above is not operational or non-existent, one begins building "bridges" of communication at various levels. The long term goal is to insure that all linkages in the system eventually become operational and successful.

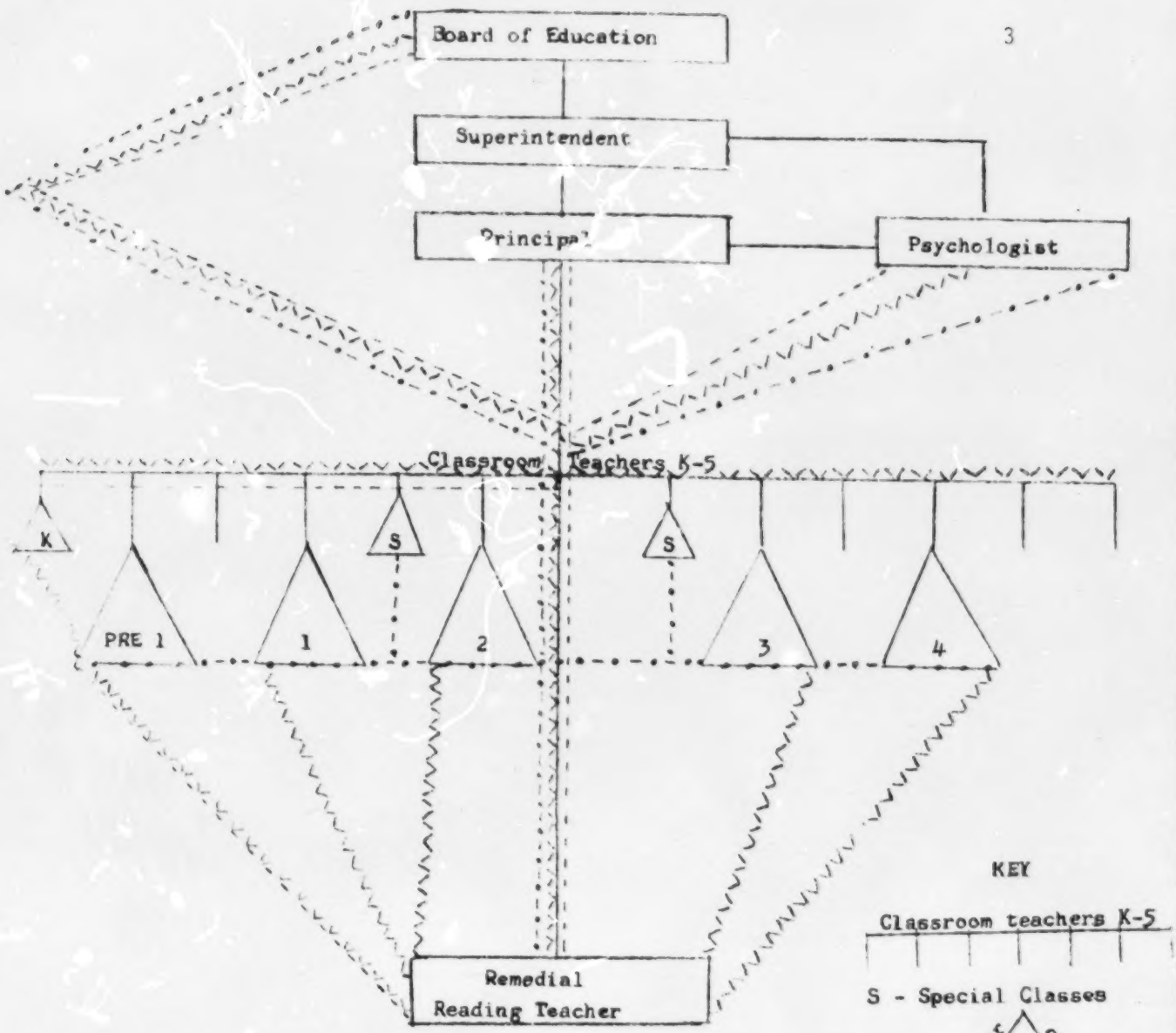

Figure 1

BEEKMANTOWN CENTRAL SCHOOL

COMMUNICATION MODEL - REMEDIAL READING

The Beekmantown Central School model (Figure 1) for articulating remedial reading services was not conceived with lofty ideals of instant success, but rather with full knowledge of the price of success. Hard work and courage are the basic principles. This model illustrated the steps and stages of development that allowed a pilot school to involve an entire educational community in the communication network over a six year period of time.

Solid lines in the model indicate communication linkages before implementation of the design and broken lines show communication linkages after implementation. Broken lines represent "bridges" of communication established between components in the model. "Bridges" were built when an idea was conveyed and accepted, resulting in changed attitudes and procedures. Each "bridge" represents a specific stage of model evolution designed to complement the long range goal of the entire community as an inter-related communication system.

Two sources of funding enabled us to more effectively carry out the design of this model, the New York State Mini Project Program and the Beekmantown Curriculum Development Program. The Mini Project requires that local schools submit proposals to a regional educational center which screens and ranks them for submission to the State Education Department for final approval. The Beekmantown Curriculum Program requires that teachers submit proposals to a teacher's committee which screens them for submission to the board of education and administration for final approval. Although these avenues of funding may not be available to you, they were a means to an end at Beekmantown Central School.

Components of the communication system will vary over the nation; however, the design and strategy of this system can be applied universally. Keen perception of human resources and a willingness to work hard are the only elements necessary to implement the model.

In this model, "bridges" are built during three stages of development: phase one, language and perceptual skills; phase two, in-service training for teachers; and phase three, parent-teacher workshops. As we move through each phase of development, note the over-lapping and inter-related lines of communication that emerge.

The role of the reading teacher at Beekmantown Central School is to work with student referrals from grades one through five whose potential is average, but whose reading level is one half year or more below grade level. Of approximately 700 children in these grades one-hundred and twenty were referred to the reading teacher who was able to work with seventy of these children in small groups. The remaining referrals were placed on a waiting list.

An additional group of five classes also existed in the program, where the student/teacher ratio of not more than 20:1 was low enough that it was felt remedial reading services for these children would not be required. Children in these classes often came from disadvantaged homes and lacked many of the linguistic and perceptual skills essential for reading achievement. Clearly, every child in these classes was a potential candidate for remedial services and none of these teachers was able to provide remediation for them.

How could the long range goal of the entire community as an interrelated communication system be kept in view while reaching only those students referred for remedial reading? In attaining the long range goal, each of the five classes must be brought into the communication network.

Where do you begin? What can be done today to create a climate for learning for the children and teachers of these groups who were not progressing at a rate normal for children of their age? These classes had many children who were already "dropping out" academically and socially. Traditional methods and techniques were not meeting the needs of these students. There was indeed a need for change in materials, methods and techniques.

In the process of change, three types of teachers became apparent: early adaptor, mid-adaptor and late adaptor, each having their own identifiable characteristics. Early adaptors were characterized by youth, recent training, less experience and lack of tenure, flexible attitudes and a willingness to risk change supported by reliable research. Mid-adaptors, though older, more experienced and tenured, were responsive to change only when its benefits were both observed and verbalized by their peers. Late adaptors, while experienced, tenured and nearing retirement, were threatened by both the change and the change agent(s).

Since the psychologist had tested and referred many children in the five classes, she represented the logical place to establish a communication linkage. Our mutual concern for these youngsters and a recognition of the need for parent participation in articulation of remedial services

lead to the writing of a series of mini-projects and curriculum proposals for funding which enabled us to more effectively implement the model.

The first phase of model development was facilitated by a mini-project which allowed us to purchase and use a carefully selected variety of language and perceptual programs. Emphasis was placed at early grade levels, one through three, using the reading room as a resource center. Volunteers and college students worked with small groups of children under the guidance of the reading teacher. Observable learning results based on the Slingerland test were sufficiently encouraging to cause the reading teacher's assignment to be modified. The assignment not only included the continuation of working with approximately seventy students, but also an additional assignment of working directly with one classroom teacher to expand the use of new reading materials.

The pre-first grade teacher with whom the reading teacher worked exhibited characteristics of an early adaptor. We both recognized there would be no progress without risk and that change was not necessarily equated with success. New approaches to discipline and motivation, learning centers, perceptual programs and diagnostic-prescriptive procedures were components in comprehensive planning.

The first week of school children were tested and placed in four reading groups with the remedial teacher working with the lowest group daily for one half hour sessions. Short, daily planning sessions were used in implementing the program to insure maximum success.

Home-based reading effort was the initial step in family participation of the reading program. Letters were sent to each parent to explain the

reading program and to enlist their support. Parents were asked to enter into a contract which stated, "I gave five minutes to listen to (child's name) read his/her take-home story today," (parent's signature). Children's comments indicated that parental contracts were paying off. "I taught my Daddy that one." "Mommy didn't know that word so I told her." A point system was established for reading at home which enabled students to earn paperback books for building personal mini-libraries. The motivation generated by this involvement resulted in long term gains, library books were being read by the entire family.

By mid-year we were aware that the anticipated progress was occurring with these youngsters. Word was getting around that non-readers were reading and results of spring Stanford Achievement testing confirmed that word. A firm foundation for preventing failure had been laid and mid-adaptors appeared on the horizon. Administration, convinced of the progress made by the group, planned for an expansion of the program at first grade level. The reading teacher's assignment was modified again. She now worked directly with the pre-first and first grade teachers and continued working with approximately fifty referrals from grade one through five.

The scene was now set for the second phase of model implementation. Recognizing the need for additional materials and the tremendous amount of time involved in comprehensive planning, the reading teacher proposed that local curriculum funds be used for in-service training and the purchase of reading, language and perceptual materials. The proposal permitted the reading teacher to make an appeal directly to the board of education

concerning the needs of educationally deprived children and for in-service training for teachers. That remedial services had been effectively articulated to the board of education was demonstrated by their approval for the total amount of the budget request.

In-service sessions, carefully designed for developing a sound philosophy of education, unified the group in a non-threatening atmosphere. The openness on the part of teachers to admit that negative teacher attitudes directly affected their children's achievement pointed the way for learning new techniques in the development of positive teacher attitudes.

The first grade teacher involved in the second phase of model implementation characterized the mid-adaptor. Her observation of phase one success resulted in her willingness to consider new techniques. She had the capacity to incorporate them into the learning process at stages known to be critical in preventing failure. Her ability to envision and translate new concepts into small learning tasks helped to assure children's uninterrupted, daily progress. Significant increases in test scores had a noticeable effect on both administration and teachers. Clearly, expansion of the program was inevitable. This newly incorporated teacher now represented a strong communication linkage in promoting model acceptance to her peers.

Because this phase of model evolution progressed more rapidly than anticipated, reinforcement of phase one and two was in order. A two year strategy for coordinating the reading program through another mini-grant and two curriculum proposals was launched. The mini-grant addressed itself to conceptual and perceptual needs of educationally deprived kindergarten

children using parents as participants in supportive roles under the guidance of the reading teacher. Parental awareness of the significance of their listening role in building self confidence reinforced the home-based communication linkage. The local proposals focused on in-service training for teachers involved in the expansion at second, third and fourth grade levels.

The expanded role of the reading teacher at this stage of model evolution clearly indicated that "bridges" had been built. The reading teacher's previous assignment had now evolved into working directly with the five classroom teachers in coordinating the reading program for these children. This relationship of reading teacher and classroom teacher enabled us to identify and deal effectively with every child's reading problem in these classes.

The standard of excellence with which these teachers were charged included accepting the responsibility for failure as well as the responsibility for success of children in their classes. Though sobering, this challenge was accepted as indicated by the willingness of teachers to commit themselves in writing to this philosophy.

One of the communication patterns that emerged in the framework of the classrooms was close parent-child-teacher relationships which is symbolized in the model by triangles. Involvement of parent-child-teacher in this setting was non-threatening and paved the way for smooth transition into the third phase of communication development which is where we are today.

Our present phase of model evolution is parent-teacher workshops. Again a mini-grant and a local proposal enabled us to plan for two

consecutive parent-teacher workshops which involved all the parents of these children. The first workshop series introduced parents to how children learn, how teachers teach reading, reading demonstrations by the children, a reading oriented game night with parent-child-teacher participation and a fall and spring program. The second workshop series involved parents in small groups and seminars which focused on the relationship of nutrition to learning, improved parent-child interactions, participation in perception activities, a reading game night and a fall and spring program. Approximately one third of the parents attended the workshops. The fall and spring programs resulted in "standing room" only.

In developing the model we have not progressed rapidly, but had a long term design in which all linkages in the model would be functioning, operational and successful in a six year period of time. "Bridges" have been built at specified locations within and between the components of the system. Ideas were conveyed and accepted, resulting in changed attitudes and procedures. The long range goal of the entire community was kept in view while working on each phase of model implementation. Parents, as a necessary and important ingredient, were becoming partners in their children's educational process.

As we view this model today, we recognize that some "bridges" need to be strengthened and new "bridges" need to be built. Construction is hard work that requires planning and involves risk, but we are reminded that there is no progress without risk. There is a lesson to be learned as we reflect on the proverbial turtle, "Behold the turtle, he makes no progress unless he sticks his neck out."

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